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Notes on birds from Africa with descriptions of three new subspecies

by Robert W. Dickerman

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While identifying specimens in three collections from Liberia, recently received by the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) (see Dickerman *et al.* 1994), several problems became evident that affect the nomenclature of species beyond the limits of Liberia. Unless noted, all specimens examined were in the collections of the AMNH or British Museum (Natural History) (BMNH). In the text, type locality in abbreviated to TL, and "western" refers to populations with ranges west of the Dahomey forest gap. All measurements are in millimeters.

BLUE-SPOTTED WOOD DOVE *Turtur a. afer*

No subspecies were recognised by Urban *et al.* (1986) nor by Colston & Curry-Lindahl (1986). However *mearnsi* (TL Ethiopia) is definitely paler and larger than nominate *afer*. The wing chord of 9 *mearnsi* (sexes alike) measured 113–121 (mean 116.4, s.d. 2.1), while the wings of 10 West African *afer* (5 each sex) measured 101–110 (mean 106.9, s.d. 3.0). Urban *et al.* (1986) gave wing measurements for five males and five females from South Africa as: 107–112 (109) and 109–112 (110) respectively. It should be noted that an adult female from the highlands of northern Cameroon (AMNH 415096) is both dark and large (wing 117), and perhaps represents an isolated population of larger birds.

YELLOW-THROATED CUCKOO *Chrysococcyx flavigularis*

The population west of the Dahomey forest gap is extremely poorly represented in ornithological collections. Fry *et al.* (1988) wrote that there were only 7 records west of Cameroon, some undoubtedly sight records. The species was described from Ghana.

Comparisons were made among 17 specimens: 15 of the eastern population (9 adult males, 2 juvenile or 1st basic plumaged males, and 6 females); and 2 females of the western population, the only specimens available. These latter differed from the 4 eastern females and 2 female-plumaged males. The eastern (and apparently more common population) may be named as

Chrysococcyx flavigularis parkesi subsp. nov.

Holotype. Adult female, LACM 70110, collected at Mongira in the Bwamba Forest, western Uganda on 3 November 1968 by Andrew Williams. Field number B155.

Diagnosis. Female and young males similar to nominate form, but browner, less creamy-white ventrally, this especially obvious on undertail coverts. No males of nominate form seen. Plate 5 in Fry *et al.* (1988) illustrates the female plumage of *parkesi*.

Measurements of type. Wing chord 96; tail 65; exposed culmen 17.2.

Etymology. I name this cuckoo for my colleague, close friend and severest critic, Dr. Kenneth C. Parkes of Carnegie Museum of Natural History.

Range. Specimens examined only from Cameroon, Zaire and Uganda, but probably occurs in forested regions east of the Dahomey gap (see Fry *et al.* 1988: 85).

Specimens examined. *C. f. flavigularis*: Sierra Leone 1 F; Liberia 1 F. *C. f. parkesi*: Cameroon 1 ad.M, 2 imm.M, 2 F; Zaire 2 M, 1 F; Uganda 6 ad.M, 1 F.

WHITE-BELLIED KINGFISHER *Alcedo leucogaster batesi*

Fry *et al.* (1988, 1992) apparently combined the smaller birds, *batesi*, (TL Bitye, Cameroon) of the mainland with the larger sized nominate birds from Bioko (formerly Fernando Po). Chapin (1922), in describing *batesi*, found only a single mainland bird to have as long a wing chord, and none to have as deep bills as the 3 nominate specimens he had available. Remeasuring some of the same specimens, but with the added material from Bioko discussed by Amadon (1953), I found only two of 17 (12%) *batesi* had the wing chord or two of 16 (13%) had bill depth measurements as large as 8 *leucogaster*.

The first specimen of *A. leucogaster* from Tanzania is a dark-billed immature (by ovary) female, AMNH 826002, that was remade from a spirit specimen. It was taken 11 July 1987 by Kim M. Howell (field no. 4036) in Minzoro Forest Reserve west of Lake Victoria, about 50 km northwest of Bukoba. It represents the subspecies *leopoldi* and extends its range eastward into Tanzania.

Contra Fry *et al.* (1988), *leopoldi* is not paler in either its blue or its red colours than *leucogaster (sensu stricto)*, nor than *batesi*. It differs

from them in lacking a rufous (or vinaceous) superciliary, and in having pale greenish-blue bars on the crown and nape in both adults and young. And, *contra* Fry *et al.* (1992), only the two young *leopoldi* (including the Tanzania specimen) of the ten dark-billed immatures seen to date have the "... mantle spangled with [pale] blue", a character they ascribed to the juvenal plumage of the species. The other eight young (2 *bowdleri*, 5 *batesi*, 1 *leucogaster*) have dark blue backs similar to those of adults. The breast band of juveniles is a somewhat paler rufous than in adults and it usually has a dusky wash.

BLUE-HEADED BEE-EATER *Merops muelleri* subsp.

Fry *et al.* (1988, 1992) stated that the sexes are alike. However, in series in the AMNH and the BMNH, males (from throughout the species' range), while similar to each other, are readily distinguished from most specimens labelled female. Males have more intense colouration, brighter cinnamon backs, deeper blue venters and deeper red throats. Males are somewhat larger than females.

Amadon (1953), in discussing the Bioko population, assumed that "previous authors" were correct in not recognising *marionis* described from "Bakaki, Fernando Po" (Alexander 1903) as distinct from the mainland populations. They were wrong. Island birds are larger, especially in wing chord. With sexes combined, the measurements for *marionis* (n=11) and *mentalis* (n=18), respectively, are: 85–92 (87.4 ± 1.6) *vs* 81–85.5 (82.9 ± 1.4) (range, mean and standard deviation).

LITTLE GREEN BULBUL *Pycnonotus virens*

Rand (1960) apparently followed Amadon (1953) who considered the population of *P. virens* on Bioko to be the same as the nominate subspecies (TL Gabon) on the mainland. However, independent comparisons of series from Bioko with mainland series in the AMNH in 1988 and in the BMNH in 1993 show that the island population is distinct and may be known as

Pycnonotus virens poensis subsp. nov.

Holotype. Adult male, AMNH 297652, collected at Basepu, "Fernando Poo" (=Bioko), on 24 August 1929 by Jose G. Correia.

Diagnosis. Similar to nominate *P. virens*, but greener (less brown) dorsally, and brighter yellow ventrally (although still a dull yellow). These characters hold even when immature *poensis* are compared with adult *virens*.

Measurements of the type. Wing chord 75.5; tail 70; exposed culmen 10.0.

Etymology. Named for the island previously called Fernando Po.

Discussion. Although, to the extent possible, specimens of approximately equal museum age were compared, it turned out that foxing is slight in this species and does not override through time the subspecific characters.

Specimens examined. *P. v. poensis*: Bioko 48 (1902–1929). *P. v. virens*: Gabon 20 (1896–1957); Cameroon 81 (1905–1955); Zaire 29 (1909–1954); Angola 10 (1903–1906).

WHITE-CROWNED FOREST ROBIN *Fraseria (Malaenornis) cinerascens*

Two names are available within this species: *cinerascens* Hartlaub 1857 (TL Ghana) and *guineae* Bannerman (TL Portuguese Guinea). There are two distinct populations within this species, one pale and western, one dark and eastern, with the Dahomey forest gap separating the two. When Bannerman described *guineae*, apparently he used specimens from Cameroon and the "Congo" to represent *cinerascens* as those were, at that time, the material available in the BMNH closest to Ghana. He obviously believed *cinerascens* to represent the darker population; however he created a junior synonym of that name and the eastern, darker population is still without a name. It may now be known as

Fraseria (Melaenornis) cinerascens ruthae subsp. nov.

Holotype. Adult female, AMNH 764721, collected at Mabali, Tumba, "B.C." (=Zaire), on 9 November 1954 by James P. and Ruth T. Chapin. Field number 421.

Diagnosis. Dorsally much darker than *cinerascens*, being between Blue Black (Color 90) and Blackish Neutral Gray (Color 82) rather than near Indigo (Color 73) (Smithe 1974–1981). Head darker than back. Feathers of breast band strongly (*vs* weakly) edged with sooty black.

Measurements of type. Wing chord 60, tail 74.5, exposed culmen 13.

Etymology. Named in honour of Ruth Trimble Chapin.

Range. Forests east of the Dahomey forest gap, east to Zaire.

Specimens examined. *F. c. cinerascens*: Portuguese Guinea 3 (including type); Sierra Leone 6; Liberia 8; Niger 1; Nigeria 2. *F. c. ruthae*: Cameroon 16; Gabon 14; Zaire 4.

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IN BRIEF

THE TYPE-LOCALITY OF *NECTARINIA SENEGALENSIS GUTTURALIS* (LINNAEUS), 1766

The wide-ranging Scarlet-chested Sunbird *Nectarinia senegalensis* (Linnaeus) is a savanna woodland species, which extends from far West Africa east to Ethiopia, ranging southeast of the Lower Guinea rainforest to northern and central Namibia in the west and to Natal and Zululand in the east. Rand, in Peters' *Check-list* (1967), recognized six subspecies, but the precise total is actually greater, as he synonymized at least two valid races, *N. s. inaestimata* (Hartert), 1899, from coastal Tanzania, and *N. s. saturatior* (Reichenow), 1891, from Angola, with the southeastern terminal race *N. s. gutturalis* (Linnaeus), 1766, the type-locality of which will be considered below.

Certhia gutturalis Linnaeus, 1766, is based on a reference of Brisson, 1760, the original material believed to emanate from "Brasilia" (=Brazil), then a major Portuguese colony. As demonstrated by Vincent (1935), Brazil continued to be seen as the provenance of the material upon which *gutturalis* was founded for the remainder of the Eighteenth Century, until corrected by Shaw, *Gen. Zool.*, vol. viii, 1812, p. 255, to southern Africa. Levaillant, *Hist. Nat. Ois. d'Afr.*, vol. vi, 1808, p. 165, who through the course of his southern African travels between 1781 and 1784 at no time operated within the established range of *N. senegalensis*, referred to the species as "La Caffrerie", apparently on Dutch settler hearsay and through his close association with C. J. Temminck and the Leiden Museum. The Levaillant reference seemingly influenced Vincent (1935, *Bull. Brit. Orn. Cl.* 55: 97) to select the southeastern Cape Province as a restricted type-locality for *gutturalis*. This was not a good choice, however, as the eastern Cape was only opened up to the collecting of natural history specimens from about the time of A. Sparrman, who reached as far east as the Great Fish River during his southern African travels of *c.* 1772–1776. Later, Dr W. J. Burchell, who followed Levaillant in studying the southern African arid zone biota, collected extensively in the Cape between 1811 and 1815, to be followed in turn by Dr Andrew Smith between 1821 and 1837. None of these students turned up the Scarlet-chested Sunbird in the Cape Province. Reichenow (1905, *Vögel Afrikas*, vol. 3) lists no Cape records, and indicated that the